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LABOR SUPPLY AND LABOR PROBLEMS

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If, as is generally agreed, soil and climate exerted a determining influence in the growth and spread of slavery in the South, it is perhaps safe to assume that these two elements of the physical environment still sustain a vitally important relation to the main body of labor problems peculiar to the section. Indeed, it requires no very extensive acquaintance with the physiography of this section for one to see that the primary and predominant energy of its population naturally turns to the extractive industries.

The soil and climate of the vast coastal plain, which extends from the Potomac to the Rio Grande and for present purposes includes in its sweep the Piedmont plain and the lower Mississippi Valley, proclaim agriculture the leading extractive industry of the South. In order to support the proposition just made, and in order to give a degree of definiteness to the point involved it may be stated that according to the census of 1900 three-fifths of those gainfully employed in the South are engaged in agricultural pursuits, while in the North Atlantic states only one-eighth of the people gainfully employed are to be found in agricultural lines of activity. Moreover, the rich deposits of coal and iron in certain Appalachian regions of the South invite exploitation and are making mining another extractive industry, which, although of relatively small importance now, will doubtless be of increasing significance to the future student of southern labor problems. The native forests of the South have given rise to a series of extractive pursuits, but these pursuits, unlike that of mining, are of decreasing importance in their relation to the number of people gainfully employed.

While the physical features of the section thus tend to direct the primary energies of the people into extractive channels, there are additional considerations in the case which suggest the naturalness of an increasing superinduction of secondary industries upon those of the primary character. Why should not the vast stores of

potential power available in this section, whether of water, or of steam, or derivately of electricity, be utilized in converting the raw products of the extractive industries into finished products ready for the consumers' market? Of course I am aware that such a change is gradually taking place, and, indeed, so striking is this movement that it has come to be regarded by some as perhaps the essential feature of the new South. Whether or not the change just referred to is the essential feature of the new South is a matter which it is not to our purpose now and **here** to discuss. Certainly, however, the question asked and the point involved in the change may serve the useful purpose of leading us up to an elevation from which, with a becoming perspective, we may get a glimpse of some of the essential features of the labor problems of the new South.

Without in the least disputing the fact that a notable beginning has been made in the way of introducing manufactures in the South, I venture to suggest that the immediate handicap to and limitation upon the expansion of such enterprises in this section lies in a dearth of population. A relatively small population located upon a reasonably productive soil rarely makes the economic mistake of developing an extensive system of manufactures. To be sure, the degree of density which a population having commercial intercourse with other regions must attain before it can profitably engage on an extensive scale in manufacturing enterprises depends upon a variety of circumstances and is therefore a matter which cannot be easily predetermined. In what has been said, however, only the immediately perceptible and superficial side of the question has been stated. It is not enough to say that the density of population in the South, considered in relation to the agricultural resources, has been insufficient to warrant a large development of manufactures. When the splendid opportunities which nature seems to offer not only for the development of the primary pursuits but also for the growth of secondary lines of activity are surveyed, the question assumes the form of asking not so much, indeed, why the people who are here have failed to develop manufactures to a greater extent, but rather why there are not more people here. To be specific, why has Rhode Island 407 people per square mile and South Carolina only 44; why has Massachusetts 348 and North Carolina only 39; why has New York 152 and Georgia only 37;

why has Pennsylvania 140 and Alabama only 35; why has New Jersey 250 and Florida only 10? It is very much easier to ask the question than to answer it. Indeed, this paper will not attempt to make an adequate answer to the query for the very good reason that an adequate and exhaustive discussion of the subject would throw into relief all that is fundamental in relation to the economic life of the South and would require an equipment in data and in analytic powers far greater than the writer possesses.

A few suggestions however will be ventured with reference to the comparatively meagre apportionment of population to the South, because the question has such a fundamental relation to the labor supply and to the labor problems of the section. An element in the physical environment referred to in the opening sentence of this paper no doubt has an immediate as well as an indirect relation to the problem in hand. The climate of this section and certain conditions of the physical environment which often accompany a warm climate do not exert a highly invigorating effect upon the people, and consequently highly creative and well sustained mental and physical exertion is not a characteristic mark of those who live in the South.

A moving population normally follows a direction marked out by the prospects of increased well-being. The lack of the evidences of general prosperity particularly in the rural South is not calculated to stimulate a large current of migration in this direction. When the great mass of those who are here rise to the position of positive economic accomplishment there will be strong inducement for others to come and share in exploiting the resources of the South. Moreover, the climate has an important relation to the present peculiar composition of the southern population. The Negro is here because the climate and soil and the white man's cupidity have placed him here. To what extent his presence in this section has served and even now serves to deflect the course of white migration in this country from a southerly direction it is not easy to estimate. Nor is it any easier to determine the measure in which he possibly supplies what might otherwise be an unoccupied gap in our population.

Although we have thus made prominent the fact that from certain points of view there is a scarcity of labor in the South, it is perhaps already apparent that the fundamental labor problem is not

concerned with methods of directly inducing immigration. To be sure that may be an incidental problem of some importance, but the effective stimulation to southern immigration is to come indirectly and as a result of the solution of the more urgent problems in the case. Moreover, in view of what has already been said, it is hardly necessary to add that the fundamentally important labor problem in the South is not concerned with curtailing the labor of children in factories,—though to be sure a noble band of reformers are doing valiant service in that segment of the field. In this connection it is well to bear in mind that of the total number of those gainfully employed in the South less than two per cent are employed in cotton manufacturing establishments, while hardly more than ten per cent are engaged in all the manufacturing and mechanical pursuits! However, when a reformer is working for wholesome results and is meeting with success in his endeavor we can pardon the fault of losing all sense of perspective in his zealous advocacy of the particular cause he has espoused. On the other hand, the zeal of such a reformer should not mislead the scientific student when surveying the field as a whole. It is here desired to reiterate and emphasize the fact that southern labor problems are not in a relatively large and conspicuous sense problems that relate to laborers employed in manufacturing enterprises. Such problems there are and they are of growing importance, but it will be far in the future before their significance will be comparable to the significance of the problems affecting those engaged in the extractive industries. Because strikes and lockouts and such other dramatic manifestations of economic ambition and power are of rare occurrence upon our farms it must not be supposed that all is well with them and that they present no labor problems of profound and far-reaching importance.

Granting, therefore, that southern labor problems relate mainly, though not exclusively, to agricultural laborers, it is now proposed, in indicating the essential nature of those problems, to present some of the ways in which their solution may possibly be reached. If these urgent problems are solved, there will come an increasing stream of immigration into the South, all her natural resources will be developed in a normal way, and the section will rise to a position of equal importance in the national life.

Labor is human effort put forth in behalf of human wants. If either the wants be defective or the efforts be deficient the pal-

pable go-between which we call wealth and which is so essential to human well-being is usually slight in amount. The deficiencies just suggested characterize and epitomize the southern agricultural labor situation. That description shows that the problems in the case are both psychological and physiological in character. Wants are mainly psychical affairs though of course they have a physiological basis, and the effort put forth toward their gratification is both physiological and psychological in character. Now if there be something lurking in the environment which operates so adversely upon the human system that it fails to respond adequately to the favorable opportunities for economic improvement which the environment otherwise offers, the line of approach to the secret of the difficulty is indicated. Any one familiar with conditions in southern agriculture, particularly, though by no means exclusively, with conditions in the great belt in which "cropping" arrangements prevail, knows that inefficiency characterizes the mass of laborers thus employed, and he is aware moreover that the fact of inefficiency does not follow a racial line.

It is usual to suppose that in the case of the Negro inefficiency with its psychological and physiological causes is a racial characteristic which it will require centuries to correct, if indeed there are any grounds for anticipating improvement. It is perhaps true that the Negro is racially defective in his conception of economic well-being and one may well doubt what his fate might be if he were placed in an environment that demanded considerable achievement as the price of existence. On the other hand, no one knows as yet to what extent his defective psychology may be improved when wise methods of improvement are brought to bear upon him. Nor does any one know as yet to what extent he may be physiologically weakened by the enervating influences that affect the white man in the same region.

As every one conversant with current discussions is aware much light is being thrown upon the probable causes of the inefficiency of labor in the South. The interesting phase of the whole discussion is that it is not in the least degree pessimistic in tone. It does not in stupidity close its eyes to the patent fact that labor in the South is grossly inefficient as compared with labor in other sections, but frankly recognizing the fact, it is seeking for the causes of that inefficiency, and the encouraging conclusion is being reached that

the causes are in many instances removable. If certain endemic diseases arising mainly, as it seems, from the mosquito and the hook-worm can be eradicated there is abundant reason to believe the efficiency of labor in the South may be wonderfully increased.

The great desideratum is a sane campaign against the enemies of efficiency, and the campaign should be based upon scientific knowledge and not upon sentiment. A laudable step in the right direction is the recent gift of a million dollars by a citizen of the North to be used in formulating plans for the eradication of the hook-worm. As more and more definite knowledge on such subjects is gained through the investigations of experts, this knowledge should be conveyed through various channels to the masses of the people. The physicians of the South may in relation to these problems perform an important public service. The universities of the South in their appropriate scientific departments should make constructive investigations and discoveries in relation to these problems which bear so directly upon the possibility of an advancing civilization in this section. The newspapers directly, and the lower schools indirectly, may act as effective agents in spreading and popularizing the uplifting information. The churches, forgetting their dogmas, may also come in for a fair share in such work of social uplift. Finally the state and local governments should take a large part both directly and indirectly in this campaign against the endemic diseases which undermine energy and ambition.

While we are thus brought to the conclusion that the most fundamental economic problem in the South is physiological in its primary aspects it must not be supposed that it is an exclusively physiological problem. There are two other methods of dealing with the problem, both of which, together with the physiological method, may be simultaneously used in directing an attack upon inefficiency. The physiological method seeks to remove any diseases that may prey upon the body, sapping its strength and vigor and preventing the development of normal human capacities. The other methods seek to give what may be called artificial stimulation and direction to the powers that latently exist. This stimulation and direction must come through systematic plans of education which have for their object the raising of the standard of living and the giving of specific training for the career to be followed.

The state through the agency of its school system should take

the leading part in furnishing agricultural and industrial training, and as a counterpart to such training instruction should be given in the elements of prudence and wise choice for the purpose of raising the standard of living. In seeking to elevate the standard of living it is important to bear in mind that wants should never be educated out of harmony with the possibilities of gratification. To be sure, wants should always in some degree outrun actual attainments, otherwise improvement ceases. On the other hand, if they run too far ahead of the capacity for furnishing a reasonable measure of gratification the result is chaos and not progress. There should be an immense expansion of agricultural and industrial schools in the South planned for the purpose of increasing the efficiency of labor and of gradually raising the standard of living. Booker Washington's statesmanship lies in his clear perception of the immediate work in lines of economic training that needs to be done in order that his race may make orderly progress. Washington's idea is the correct idea not only with reference to the needs of his own race at the present time but also with reference to the needs of a majority of the whole people of the South.

In this paper no allusion has been made to the possibility that a labor problem may lurk in the fact that two dissimilar races compete with each other for employment. If a program somewhat similar to the one outlined in this paper is followed for a few decades, I am aware that there may arise a labor problem primarily racial in its character. However the gravity of that possibility in no measure deters me from advocating what appears to be the wise policy from the standpoint of present needs. When the other problem comes, for indeed it is not now urgent, let us hope we may be wiser than we are at the present time, and that a solution of the problem may be reached upon the basis of a higher ethical standard than the world has ever yet brought to bear upon any large social problem.